

Conference Abstract

Improving Security for Natural Science Collections at the Michigan State University Museum

Laura Abraczinskas[‡], Barbara Lundrigan^{‡,§}

[‡] Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, United States of America

[§] Michigan State University, Department of Integrative Biology, East Lansing, United States of America

Corresponding author: Laura Abraczinskas (abraczi1@msu.edu)

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Abstract

Established in 1857, the Michigan State University (MSU) Museum houses natural science collections that include 117,000 research and teaching specimens of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, and vertebrate fossils. These collections are worldwide in scope and provide a record of biodiversity that ranges from 1844 to the present day. The collections contain specimens of rare, endangered, threatened, and extinct species. Within each vertebrate discipline, specimens are cataloged into designated research or teaching collections; these are housed within multiple research and preservation spaces, occupying 678 square meters. Currently, 394 natural science specimens are on exhibit in the Museum's gallery spaces, which include an additional 1,830 square meters. Over the past three decades, the Museum has experienced a number of thefts from both collections and exhibit areas, with the most recent specimen theft occurring in 2011: a silky anteater (*Cyclopes didactylus*) stolen from the Museum's rainforest habitat diorama. That theft, along with the history of the others, initiated a series of improvements to the Museum's security. These included changes in personnel access to the Museum building and to collections areas; replacement and installation of new technological equipment, including key-card access and camera systems Museum-wide; and revisions of associated policies and procedures. These effectively closed "loopholes" that formerly compromised security best practice. Targeted improvements have been made at the building, gallery, elevator, room, and cabinet levels, and included specialized accommodation for specimens that are

particularly sensitive, such as rhino horn (in keeping with Natural Sciences Collections Association guidance). In addition, the Museum modified operating procedures for behind-the-scenes tours of the research and collections spaces (for example, staff-to-visitor ratio and policy for use of imaging and recording equipment).

Keywords

Natural science collections security

Presenting author

Laura Abraczinskas